



# Webinar: Digital Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities to Achieve the Global Goals

21 December 2022

**Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group**

**Digital Inclusion For Persons With Disabilities**

**To Achieve The Global Goals**

**December 21, 2022**

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you very much. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, depending on where you are, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Anir Chowdhury. I'm Policy Advisor to the program from ICT division and cabinet division of Bangladesh supported. I will be your host and moderate the session today. Today's session is "Digital Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities to Achieve the Global Goals." This will be in English. The discussion will be in English, but we'll have text captions in Bangla Sign Language. Interpretation will also be provided.

Distinguished guests, according to the World Health Organization, about 15% of the world's total population have some form of disabilities. In this age of information technology, various steps have been taken globally, and also, we are seeing these steps in Bangladesh, to ensure equal participation of all citizens, including persons with disabilities.

The person with disabilities are addressed in the four goals of the UN SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals, Goals 4, 8, 10, and 11, and also the 5th goal, which is the 17, in terms of partnerships. The rights of the persons with disabilities are highly commented in the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, which is also known as UN CRPD. Bangladesh happens to be one of the first 20 countries to sign and ratify the UN CRPD. As for the Election Manifesto 2009 of the current government, to enact the rights based law for persons with disabilities, the government enacted the rights and protection of persons with disabilities act in 2013 to ensure the rights and overall development of persons with disabilities with the issue of inclusive digital services and accessibility of persons with disabilities in digital services in short.

We also developed a draft guideline, web and digital service designing guideline for ensuring inclusive accessibility, just this year, in 2022.

Today, our objective is to promote digital inclusion to ensure that no one is left behind, one of the tenants of the UN Sustainable Development Goals on accessible digital services. To address this broad objective, we'll probe into the following two questions in today's event: The first question is, what should be the role of development partners, including the UN agencies, in supporting the government to promote digital inclusion to ensure that no one is left behind in accessing digital services? And the second question is, how can we bring national/international good practices on digital accessibility for ensuring digital inclusion?

Today, our chief guest for this event is Mr. Zeaul Alam PAA, Senior Secretary of the ICT Division. We have our special guest, Mr. Kamal, director of digital services, and our Chair is the Project Director. We have two keynote speakers, Ms. Gunela Astbrink, chairman of the Accessibility Standing Group, Internet Society, and Mr. Vashkar Bhattacharjee, National Consultant of a2i and also G3ict Country Representative and Vice Chair of Accessibility Standing Group.

We have three panelists – Swaran Ravindra, a Researcher from Fiji National University; Mr. Azfar Adib, Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers – IEEE and Member of Internet Society Bangladesh Chapter. We also have Mr. Dewan Muhammad Humayun Kabir. And our sign language interpretation. Without further ado, let me ask our first keynote speaker, Ms. Gunela Astbrink, Chair of Accessibility Standing Group. She has extensive experience in policy and research into accessible ICT with a strong understanding and involvement in general on Internet and telecommunications on legislative and regulatory issues. She's interested in overall Internet policy work. May I request Ms. Astbrink to deliver her keynote speech, please? And then we'll request our chief guest and our Chair to deliver their speeches, but let's first hear the first keynote speech. Thank you. Ms. Astbrink, please.

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chowdhury, and good morning, good afternoon, good evening to everyone, especially to our distinguished guests. We are delighted as the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group to be presenting this webinar today in conjunction with Bangladesh government and a number of different stakeholders. So, thank you very much for this opportunity.

So, I will now, hopefully, share my screen so that we can then look at my slides. If that doesn't work, then I will just speak to my slides, and I think that's probably what I'm going to do.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Gunela, I think you are a co host. You should be able to share your slides.

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** Yes. I seem to have a little bit of an issue with that when I went in, so

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Is there anybody else who may have access to the slides so that they can bring it up?

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** I have sent the slides to Joly, and he has the slides.

**JOLY MACFIE:** Because I'm in the middle of live streaming, I have so many things, I cannot do it. Gunela, you should be able to. You're co host. You should be able to share.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** Gunela, I don't have your slides.

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** Yep. I could

**JOLY MACFIE:** I can make you host temporarily, Gunela. Maybe that will work, okay? I'll do that.

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** I'm not sure if it will.

**JOLY MACFIE:** Here you go. I've made you host.

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** Okay. We'll see how we go. I think in the interest of time, rather than spending time on this, I would rather speak to you. And I think that's the most important thing, rather than spending time.

So, what I'm speaking to you about is an international perspective on digital inclusion for persons with disability. And we've already heard from Mr. Chowdhury that over 1 billion people with disabilities worldwide have a disability and functional restriction, and 80% of persons with disability live in developing countries. This is according to the World Health Organization.

And again, according to those type of statistics, 15% of the country's population have a disability. Unfortunately, people with disabilities are marginalized in many countries. So, there are many cultural, attitudinal, and economic barriers to active participation, which leads to limited educational opportunities, limited employment, and very unfortunately, women with disability are doubly disadvantaged.

So, we are talking about inclusive design, and this is also referred to as Universal Design. So, what can we do to make a difference? Designers may think of persons with disability as different or the other or persons with special needs, but, we all have specific needs at different times of our lives, which we need to remember.

Designing digital technologies to cater for a wider range of the population is essential for persons with disability and very helpful for everyone. For example, we've got captioning here, captioning of conference calls, Zoom meetings, webinars, is essential for persons with hearing loss, and it's also very helpful for people with English as a second language. We are also very pleased that we have sign language interpretation at this webinar to assist persons who are deaf to be able to participate in this webinar.

So, if we look at Internet accessibility, it's really accessibility to technology and the Internet for persons with disability that can break down barriers and open up opportunities. This is where this will make such a difference to a significant part of a population.

We've already heard that Bangladesh was very early in signing and ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and I congratulate Bangladesh for that. It has now been ratified by over 180 countries. There are a number of different obligations involved, including implementing measures to design, develop, produce, and distribute accessible ICT at an early stage, so these become accessible at minimum cost for people with disability, because otherwise, the people can't afford this, another barrier of affordability. So, this particular obligation is part of the Convention, and it's Article 9 on accessibility. But very importantly, not only is it a matter of signing and ratifying, but this needs to be followed by action, so it's developing policy, legislation, regulation, and then implementing that to make a real difference.

So, web accessibility. Well, this underpins accessibility online service delivery. And many governments have adopted the W3C, as in the World Wide Web Foundation Consortium, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines called WCAG 2.1AA, and that will soon be updated in the next few months. And one of the other things is that these guidelines now include accessible apps. So, this is an opportunity, for example, for the Bangladesh government and in the private sector in Bangladesh and countries across the world to ensure that websites are accessible according to those guidelines.

And to ensure that it's successful, if people with disabilities are involved in the design and testing, that means that we are very much more likely to have accessible websites and apps, so it's that involvement by persons with disability that makes a big difference.

I also wanted to touch on accessibility in public procurement. This is quite powerful. This means the way government purchases, and in particular, ICT in this particular case. In the U.S., there are Section 508 guidelines, and in Europe and in Australia, there are standards. Australia's, for example, adopted the European standard, which is called EN301549 on ICT accessibility criteria in government purchasing, i.e., public procurement.

And why is this important? Well, governments are one of the largest purchasers of ICT in any country, really, and therefore, can influence the marketplace to produce more accessible technology. Also, there is the European Accessibility Act and a new Web Accessibility Directive. And I mention this because with the European Accessibility Act, for example, this requires European national legislation to be made in various European countries by last year and to be applied by 2025. Now, why would that be of interest in Bangladesh? Well, it's obviously setting a good example. But if there are companies in Bangladesh, for example, who wish to sell their software products to a European country, in the Eurozone, then that particular accessibility act comes into force in 2025. So, really, it's a matter of planning now to ensure that products/software are accessible.

So, I've touched on this already a little bit, but I wanted to mention the motto of the disability movement. This is "Nothing about us without us." So, persons with disability have

a lived experience of online barriers and can also then, through that lived experience, help to reduce barriers through various governance structures to be part of a solution. So, it's not a matter of an agency saying, "We will fix this; we will do it for persons with disability," it's a matter of doing it with persons with disability. And this is where communication and engagement by and with persons with disability are key factors in that decision making.

So, I must mention Vashkar Bhattacharjee here, who we heard is Vice Chair of the ISOC Accessibility Standing Group, and also has a key role to play in the Bangladesh government to make a difference and to inform and engage with government processes.

And I also wanted to mention that this year, there was a partnership between the Asia Pacific School of Internet Governance, and the Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group, and this is about disability leadership training. We need more people. We need more people like Vashkar, a variety of people with disabilities, that can then present their lived experience. And we have helped to make that happen, and there's much, much more work to be done to strengthen the disability voice.

So, there was a pilot workshop in Dhaka in June this year, bringing in people with disability from various South Asian countries to have capacity building and, more or less, train the trainer process. This resulted in the Dhaka Declaration, which is advocating various commitments to making a difference, to increasing accessibility. And I've put a link in there to that, which is [apc.Asia/cb for pwds](https://www.apc.org/cb-for-pwds). And all going well with funding, we hope to have an online course operational next year, and also, depending on funding, we wish to have more workshops in the region.

I should state that the pilot workshop in Dhaka was also it was we had great support from the Bangladesh Internet Society Chapter and also very welcomed support from Article 19 to make it happen. So, I've mentioned a number of things that can be done through the international perspective. I've mentioned about web accessibility, content guidelines, which includes a wide range of different criteria, and that also includes things like good contrast, readability, and that's something we need to consider, not only with text and images, but it could be logos on webinars, for example, a range of different things.

So, I also wanted to finish by saying it's very exciting that the Bangladesh government have only in the last few months agreed to adopt the Marrakesh Treaty, and so, we look forward to further implementation based on that. And I wish to finish off by saying thank you very much and I look forward to hearing progress from Bangladesh as to how we move forward together. Thank you very much.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you very much, Ms. Astbrink, for that wonderful presentation, even though you were limited by not having the slides in front of us, but I think you delivered very important messages. I take away three important things, very, very important things. You've covered a lot, but I think the first thing that I take away is not just policy and guidelines, but implementation of those. I mean, we may be developing them, ratifying them, Marrakesh Treaty and then all the UN Charter, but we need to implement that. And I think in Bangladesh, we are doing a decent job, and we will discuss that further. We've made our national portal accessible. We are making sure from the a2i division that the services and apps are accessible, so we're making that difference.

The second thing you pointed out are the partnerships we need to have, public, private, and academic partnership. I think that's also in progress and I think more can be done. The third important thing is the co creation with persons with disabilities so that their lived experiences are incorporated in the design and the accessibility measures that we take. So, we take those three points very seriously.

Before I go into the second keynote speech, I think our chief guest and our Chair, they have to leave for an urgent meeting, so I would like to request our chief guest, Mr. Zeaul Alam PAA, I'm asking him to deliver his kind speech. Thank you.

**ZEAUL ALAM:** Thank you for giving me the chance to be first up, and I would also like to thank you for your nice moderation and nice introduction to this session. And also I thank Ms. Gunela for her informative and insightful presentation. As the chair of this, respective special guest, Mr. Saleh of the Department of Social Service of Bangladesh, all distinguished guests, good morning and good afternoon. At the outset, I would like to remember deep



respect and honor for the nation. (Background noise) The new country, a great nation by giving great importance in education and in the advancement of science and technology for the younger generation, including persons with disability.

Over the last decade, we have reached many of our goals and milestones. We have been able to transfer the country to a digital nation that is simply through the work keeping in mind no one left behind and under our Prime Minister and the proper guidance of our advisor, the architect of Digital Bangladesh.

As we have come to know, about 15% of the world's population has some form of disabilities. In this age of information technology, various steps have been taken internationally to ensure equal participation of all citizens, including persons with disabilities in digital service. Persons with disabilities are, as we told earlier, in the four Sustainable Development Goals. Also, the right of persons with disabilities are highly appreciated in the CRPD, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Bangladesh is among the first 20 countries of the world to sign and ratify the UN CRPD as part of the commitment of the current government in 2008 to enact the rights based law for persons with disability. In 2013, the government enacted the protection of persons with disabilities act 2013 to ensure rights and development of persons with disabilities where the issues of inclusive digital service and accessibility of persons with disabilities in digital service are (?) that have already been introduced by our moderator.

We also it was already discussed that we also adopted the guideline for designing and ensuring these steps. This is the opportunity and now we are going to finalize it.

Meanwhile, the Department of Social Service has identified and registered more than 30 persons with disabilities in their digital system. The current government has taken various initiatives to involve this large scope on digital service. We have the largest government website and about 2,000 citizens for this in the various government and field levels in Bangladesh and automated. In addition, various job sectors, including news, online and mobile, have gained immense popularity, and it is steadily increasing.

In order to make this government and private website mobile activities have started and we are now working on it and some we have provided accessibility and insured accessibility. And at this time, we ensure 70% of the accessibility in our digital for these persons.

Now, the textbooks is also made in the form of multimedia, talking both from net for visibly impaired persons. Currently, persons with disabilities receive accessible at the beginning, just like other normal students. During the COVID 19 situation, multimedia talking booths very useful for all students. Very recently, I visited the blind dedication and rehabilitation development organization of Bangladesh. They are now very busy printing all the academic books of the government using their own braille printer. The accessible online dictionary in collaboration with Bangla, all students, including the visually impaired and other students also have the opportunity to use it. And digitally accessible dictionaries are available, Bangla to English, English to Bangla, and again, Bangla.

We have been working to make digital services accessible for banks working to ensure accessible for persons in the event in these sectors.

In the last study of Digital Bangladesh, 22nd December, Honorable Prime Minister declared Smart Bangladesh by 2041, with smart citizens, smart government, smart economy and smart society by using upcoming technology. As we believe that only technology can make visible people, it will for normal people so includes the visible person as a vital part of our citizen, as a vital member of Smart Bangladesh citizen.

At last, I would like to say, it is our duty to make our Bangladesh national Bangla (?) so that in 2041, we can be a developed nation and knowledge base that is innovative and inclusive society and the smart Bangladesh. With this, I would like to conclude. Thank you all.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you very much with your inspiring words and including Bangladesh in the future plans. So, that's very encouraging. I would like to add that we took

an initiative recently to develop a report, a digital divide report called "Equality Through E Quality." So, basically, by ensuring digital quality's ensured for everyone, we can actually ensure equality in society. For instance, ICT can actually create digital provides, instead of digital divide, if we applied to everybody, leaving no one behind.

May I now ask our Chair of today's session, Dr. Dewan Muhammad Humayun Kabir. Thank you very much for your presence. Thank you. Dr. Humayun Kabir, please.

**DEWAN MUHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR:** Okay. Am I audible?

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Yes, please, go ahead.

**DEWAN MUHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR:** Okay. Good morning. Good evening or good day, based on your current time zone. It's really an honor for me to be a part of very important issues, not only in Bangladesh, but global issues. Thank you, everyone, for connecting us. Honorable guests just spoken a few minutes back, and the Senior Secretary of the technology division with the people's republic of Bangladesh. Then respected special guest, Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal with the Department of Social services. These disability issues are welfare and everything. Then we have today's panel discussion as Swaran Ravindra, academic at Fiji National University and a member of the institute of Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, Azfar Adib, and Mozammel Haque. And we have a representative of G3ict ICT and Vice Chair of Accessibility Standing Group.

And first, we hear from the first keynote speaker, Gunela Astbrink, Chair of the Accessibility Standing Group, Internet Society, moderator Anir Chowdhury, policy advisor, and everyone connected here. Thank you very much.

December is a month of victory for Bangladesh, as well it is the 50 years of adopting our constitutions. In our constitutions, the preamble, it is mentioned very clearly that we are placing that it shall be a fundamental aim of the State to realize through the democratic

process of socialist society, free from exploitation, a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights, freedom, equality, and justice, political, economic, and social will be secured for all citizens, no discrimination. That's about the state commitment to the citizen and the global people. Many steps have been taken, both nationally and internationally, that's been mentioned by our keynote speaker, our chief guest, and also our moderator. I will not repeat. So, we have a very strong commitment to implement the SDG 4, 8, 11, and 17, related to the accessibility issues and disability issues, so it's a very strong commitment.

And also, we are first 20 countries, as has been mentioned, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We have a strong commitment to the implementation, very, very strongly. The (?) that's been mentioned. So, as our moderator has been mentioning that the more key issues that better is implementation, commitment and co creation with the global compliance. So, we will work on that.

I can finish my speech quoting from his excellency, Kofi Annan, the Ex Secretary General of the United Nations, that's been said, more than ever before in human history, we have a common destiny. We can master it only if we can face it together. We want to face it together. Thank you, everyone, again.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you very much, Dr. Kabir. I think you highlighted very well the things we are facing in Bangladesh and the quote from the former Secretary General is very inspiring as well. Thank you for your presence. I know you have to run for another meeting, so feel free to do that. We will continue with the rest of our program.

**DEWAN MUHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR:** I am really, really sorry because they are waiting for me for a very important session.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Sure. Thank you for your presence.

**DEWAN MUHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR:** Thank you, everyone.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Let me go back to the second keynote from our very own Vashkar Bhattacharjee, National consultant of Accessibility in a2i and country representative of G3ict and Vice Chair of ISOC Accessibility Standing Group. As we all know, Vashkar is interested in ICTs for development but deeply passionate about e accessibility and information accessibility for persons with disabilities. He is visually impaired but refuses to let this be a restriction on his life and his achievements. As we will know that he leverages ICT to actually perform amazing tasks in his daily life and also guide us at a national and international level towards rights of persons with disability and inclusion in digital lifestyle for persons with disability. Vashkar, over to you.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** Thank you, moderator. I think I am also facing the same difficulties for sharing my screen. So, however, I would like to go with my own voice. I believe it is clear and loud enough for you to understand. Okay. (Screen reader).

Can you see my screen?

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Your screen has come.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** Thank you very much.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Great, wonderful.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** Ladies and gentlemen, honorable guests, panelists, and speakers, we are very honored to host this webinar and I am now very glad to be part of it as a speaker for today's session.

You know that Bangladesh has began its journey in 2009 as a digital Bangladesh. And since then, a2i has been working to promote digital inclusion in accessibility for people with disabilities in Bangladesh. We are working through different mechanisms by engaging people with disabilities. Almost all of our services, including webs (screen reader reading) all the ministries, all the departments, and even in the local government, these are all based on part of our national portal.

We have different service mechanism for making information accessible for people with disabilities. Ladies and gentlemen, Bangladesh government have three commitments to ensure digital accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. One is the legal commitment; two, the political commitment; three is the global commitment. I'd like to come with the political commitment. Bangladesh government, current government, they're committed to their manifesto. Last three before the last three elections, they have included disability issues in their manifesto. And now we are seeing inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities as a key end of the political end of the current government.

Secondly, there is a legal commitment. I think all of our guests already talked about that. Bangladesh already adopted the Disability Rights Protection Act 2013 and through that there is a separate section on digital accessibility. And if we could implement that, then there will be no discrimination for people with disabilities. So, this is the legal commitment of the Bangladesh government.

Third is the global commitment. Again, we know Bangladesh verified the UN Convention of Rights of Persons With Disabilities and Article 9 talks about accessibility. Article 21 talked about the right to information. And Bangladesh government are highly committed to achieve all the rights as described in the UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

As you know, we need to report back to the UN, and we are just very much committed for that. And also, Bangladesh would like to achieve SDG by 2030 and inclusion is another priority area. And the main motto of the SDGs is "No one left behind."

For achieving all of these three commitments, we have a program working and we are promoting a few of the issues, like accessibility. We now develop National Web Accessibility Guideline, that is job tech, and we have audit by engaging people with disabilities. What we are saying is nothing about us without us. Our digital accessibility leaders came from different types of disabilities. They are serving with us as experts. And also, we are just providing technical support to different non government organizations for making their website accessible. We have developed the accessibility plug in, by which people with disabilities get a better experience of using web and e service.

I'm not sure I'm going with my slide properly or not, but I'm trying to do that.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Vashkar, we are seeing Inclusive Education right now. I think you are good.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** We have a very successful initiative to promote the inclusive education in Bangladesh. Especially, we are working to promote inclusive university. And we have piloted an initiative in the university and almost 150 students with disabilities are studying there. We have established Accessible E learning Center, developed accessible reading materials, trained youths with disabilities in technology. Also, one of our biggest is the talking book and accessible reading materials. The talking book is inclusive and accessible for all, not only people with disabilities. People can listen, people can see, and easily converted into braille.

Another inclusive initiative for inclusive education is accessible dictionary, and that is designed for people with disabilities, but everyone is using. Almost 6 million people has accessed that dictionary still to date. And we are just promoting the inclusive financial services, including banking accessibility. Currently, we are working with the Central Bank that is the Bangladesh bank to identify four banks to make their service inclusive and accessible. And again, people with disabilities are engaged here and they are just working with us as the expert, and we are working with the bank for making their service accessible, not only for digital accessibility; also we are working to change their policy to remove all the barriers for getting any service by the people with disabilities.

For creating decent employment, we have several activities, including a skill development program. We are organizing a trade fair/job fair. We are promoting the entrepreneurship for people with disabilities in Bangladesh. We are bringing the entrepreneurs with disabilities in the eCommerce, and we have one of the largest eCommerce platforms. Even though the platform is not fully accessible, entrepreneurs with disabilities already enroll here and they are selling their product. Different types of disabilities also can procure products and services from the Act Shop platform. We are trying now to make it accessible for people with disabilities.

You are seeing some of the accessibility work of our products, such as the national portal, My Gov, NiSE portal, the help line that is now accessible for different people with different disabilities, except people with hearing and speech disabilities. By May, we would like to ensure that this national help line will be inclusive for all. So, I would like to conclude my speech by thanking Internet Society Accessibility Standing Group, Internet Society Bangladesh Chapter, and also a2i and ICT Division, all the guests, and our parent ministry for people with disabilities; that is, Ministry of Social Welfare. Our Director of Social Service, our Director General is here, and he is always guiding us for making the service inclusive and accessible. Thank you very much.

I can say, Digital Bangladesh is now we are making it inclusive, but a smart Bangladesh, where our vision 2041, there will be no discrimination for people with disabilities. We are working hard to achieving that goal. Thank you.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Mr. Vashkar Bhattacharjee, thank you very much for your outstanding presentation. Just to note the two initiatives that you mentioned, the Act Shop, which is an eCommerce portal, and the NiSE3, the national intelligence for skills education, entrepreneurship, and employment. These are also being replicated in turkey, Jordan, and others, so those countries will get the benefit of making these platforms inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. So, we are also turning all of our other platforms into accessible platforms, so thank you again for the great presentation.



Let me go to the panel discussion very quickly. Our first panelist is Mr. Swaran Ravindra, who is a member of the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum 2022, a multistakeholder group. He is also a member of the Internet Society's Accessibility Standing Group, an academic at Fiji National University, and most importantly, a proud mentor to some of the incredibly brilliant disability Fellows. Swaran Ravindra, please.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chowdhury. I hope you can hear me.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Yes.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Okay, great. Thank you so much to all the panelists. I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have joined us, including our esteemed guests, my fellow colleagues of the Accessibility Standing Group. My name is Swaran. I am one of the academic team members of Fiji National University. And I have a few things to discuss today, but I must say, there is some amazing work that Vashkar and his colleagues have done in Bangladesh, and we've been hearing some great stuff happening all over the world, right? And it's good to know that there is some good benchmarking happening as well.

Now, I will not talk only about Fiji National University today, because Fiji National University's one of those few (?) universities in the world, meaning we have vocational training as well. And I happen to be part of National Training and Productivity Center of Fiji National University, which is basically the organization that belongs to the international APO member countries, so we're 1 of the 11 member countries in the world, and Fiji is the only Pacific island representative in APO.

So, over the past five years, we have successfully trained more than 100 persons with disabilities. I will tell you how my journey started off, in training for persons with disabilities. Now, I am not somebody who lives who has, you know, an I'm not a living example of a person with disabilities, which is quite challenging for me because I really wanted to help, I really wanted to enable the rights that we are actually talking about, the

policies. We have lots of policies and I'm not going to focus too much on the policies today. I just wanted to tell you where the gaps exist.

So, earlier on, Gunela and I had co hosted a session at Asia Pacific Internet Governance Forum in Singapore, and that's where we had spoken about the actual gap and how important it is to measure the parity of disability. That being said, if you look at the basic statistic sorry, if I could ask, how much time do I have, so I can decide if I can show you a presentation?

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** How much time do you need?

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** I won't be long.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** We actually have I mean, total time, we don't have a lot of time, but can you do it in two minutes?

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Yep, that's it.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Great.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** So, if you could quickly enable screen sharing.

**JOLY MACFIE:** You should have it.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Awesome.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** We can see the slides.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Okay. Thanks, Joly. You're awesome.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** If you could go through them very quickly, I would appreciate it.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Thank you. All right. So, these are the current services that the Disability Center at Fiji National University provides. So, we start off by asking for declaration, and this is where the biggest barrier is. Many people still do not want to declare disability. Many people still do not they are completely oblivious to the idea that we do have persons with disabilities. We too have 13.7% population living with disability. That is as per the last census report in Fiji. In the Pacific island, that goes just a little more than 1.2 million people. So, we still have this barrier.

However, I have seen that there are two groups of persons with disabilities, two particular groups that are very vocal on their rights, and those are the ones who have visual impairment and those who are deaf and hard of hearing. So, we see a lot of intervention at this level.

Now, the reason why there's not much that the universities at the moment can do is because these are the only ones who have actually made it to the MQR, the minimum qualification requirement, that is required for them to be part of a university or get university studies, which is why we have tried to train them vocationally. So, that number 100 that I'm telling you is actually, a majority of that is from National Training and Productivity Center, where we have trained our participants who have disabilities, many different types of disabilities, but there are lots of gaps that still exist.

So, there's some very, you know, pressing challenges that we have. We also have a policy that states that 2% of the workforce should be reserved for persons with disabilities, but that doesn't really happen in many places. And when

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** If I may request you to finish in about a minute or so, that be great.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** Okay.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you.

**SWARAN RAVINDRA:** So, when I presented these results, I was told it's not that we don't want to include, we just don't know how to. So, the intervention of assistive technology is really something that is important, and that is my area of work. Since I don't have much time, I won't be able to talk much about the work that I have been doing, but I'm happy to address any questions. Thank you. That's it for me.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Wonderful. Thank you very much, Ms. Ravindra. We will have a very short time for Q&A, but maybe after the two other panelists are finished their deliberations, we can go into Q&A very quickly.

Our next panelist is Mr. Azfar Adib, currently a researcher at university in Canada. Mr. Adib, let's talk about AI/artificial intelligence, and our future. It's best for root finding in so many ways, but would you like to enlighten our audience how persons with disabilities can benefit from the usage of AI?

**AZFAR ADIB:** Definitely. Thank you so much, Mr. Chowdhury. It's an honor and privilege for me to be here and to learn from all of this and the work in Bangladesh for disabled people.

When we talk about using technology like AI to help disabled people, so the very first thing is, I am also a member of IEEE, which is the world's largest. And we use the term "especially abled" because, yes, people can be disabled, but what we call is that they do have some special energy and how we can bring the best out of them.

So, I can share some examples. I actually live in Qatar but I am doing university in Montreal. The way it works is that whenever we are actually designing any new curriculum, any educational material, or any particular service, then EDI is a must, equality, diversity and inclusion. We have to make sure it is incorporated into our designs. When it comes to technology and when we want to make sure all of our services are accessible to disabled people, then obviously, we need to use certain mechanism.

For instance, if I become very specific, when we have an (?) in our campus or on our premises, so, usually it is article based. But for specially abled people, for use of the ID card, maybe it is difficult for them, what are the alternatives? So, that's where we are committing biometrics. The concept is that we need to have multiple options; we need to have EDI for all kinds of services. It's challenging in different aspects, but we need to prioritize. And it's just to see that under the assistance of Digital Bangladesh and Smart Bangladesh, there are so many policies. So, maybe once we build the right capability, we can enforce those. Enforcing may be the last thing to do once we have the right capability. But once we have that capability in terms of technology, it's also in terms of mind set. Mind set's also important. We really do need to have those policies.

And I would like to highlight one point about the life cycle of the disabled or specially abled people. As our honorable chief guest was sharing, there has been so many impactful work in the education sector for the disabled people. So, still we assume that we can help more people. Like, I was just checking the latest (?) which was published last June. So, currently in Bangladesh, the dropout rate for disabled people is still over 40%. However, for normal children, it is 14%. So, it is 14% for normal children but around 40% for disabled children. So, there actually maybe we can try to help further. We can see some synergy. Like in the early '90s, we had the same challenge with our female, the young girls. It was so high. But now we see more girls assisting. So, Bangladesh is quite revolutionary in that regard. And how did that happen? Things like special scholarship for girls, young kids who are going to be classified only (?) and the honorable Prime Minister has been a global champion for education.

So, I was wondering, can we do something like this for disabled children as well? Because in current Bangladesh context, disability's always interested a stigma. When a child is born with a disability, in many parts of Bangladesh, their parents see it as a curse on them. So, can we get special help, like offering some particular services for disabilities so they can have inclusive education? So, this will be just a complimentary to all of the other things, but we are starting from the basic primary level.

And we can see things like specialist persons with disabilities. And

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** If you could finish in a minute or so, I'd appreciate it.

**AZFAR ADIB:** Sure. So, can we have something like this, like this is the context for special abled children? So, the thing is that we need to use the right technology. AI can help a lot. At the center, we need to make sure we have that right mind set. And I would just finish with the one line, what we actually all know, is that we should be building connectivity and accessibility. It is amazing to see all of these things being done in Bangladesh and we are always happy to be a part of that. And maybe what we are calling disabled, we can make them specially abled, and turn digital services into that. With that note, I thank you and all the organizations for this wonderful session. Thank you so much.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Adib. So, specially abled. I think we should really go towards that kind of an empowered thinking for us as well, and we should rewire our DNA to thinking about specially abled, not just persons with disability, and have the kind of enablement that you talk about in terms of sports, in terms of devices. And I hope, I really hope that our special guest, our DGF DSS would touch on some of these.

Let me invite our third and last panelist, Mr. Mozammel Haque, programme analyst, Bangladesh. There are many commitments to the UN SDGs, UN CRPD and others. Would you guide us on how UN Bangladesh so, not just UNDP, but the whole UN system in Bangladesh supports the government to promote digital inclusion to ensure that no one

is left behind in accessing digital services with a particular focus on persons with special needs? So, special abilities. Thank you.

**MOZAMMEL HAQUE:** Thank you. It is my pleasure to be with the distinguished guests and panelists. And I heard, you know, the keynote speakers, how they are talking about the inclusive agenda, inclusion in Bangladesh, particularly when Vashkar was talking, referencing the commitment from the government, the political, legal, and also the global commitment on the UN CRPD.

The UN CRPD is the UN document. It is the United Nations Convention for Rights for Persons with Disabilities. It is the UN Convention, it is the responsibility of the UN system in terms of creating opportunities in the host country, working together with the government, in partnership, in collaboration, to support ensuring the inclusion. So, if we are talking about the inclusion, and you know, accessibility and also the right information, another thing I want to mention here regarding the reasonable accommodation, which is one of the major issues described in the UN CRPD. So, if we want to unite with reasonable accommodation, that will really help us to create a good design thinking which can enable accessibility for all.

But if I look at the UN programme, not only the UN DPS you are mentioning, I personally feel there are three ways we can support the host country government from the UN system, as UN is working closely in partnership with the government. We can work with the government in terms of supporting the government with the right policy design, right programmatic intervention, where we are supporting the government with different programmes and projects. This situation, we can really help the government in terms of better targeting, better designing, and also, we can support the government.

It has been rightly mentioned that we are not only importing the knowledge from overseas in our country; rather, we are also participating and also disseminating the knowledge that we created here for the global level so that we are in a situation, in the UN situation, any UN agency has the opportunity to maneuver this sort of process, bringing global knowledge in country, at the same time, supporting and facilitating the local knowledge to the international level that we can also help in terms of promoting the inclusion agenda.

So, another thing is regarding the implementation. When we talk about the policies and the commitment, we have legal commitment, we have policies, but what are the implementation? If you look at, you know, inclusion of persons with disabilities, if you see, look at the primary education. 97% of the primary education enrollment in our country, but if you say it is for the visible person or the persons with disabilities, you will see only 11% is there. Also the dropout rate is high. So, in such a situation, why children with disabilities are not enrolled? Why the dropout rate is high? Because the education system is not inclusive, although we have inclusive education policy, or we are trying. So, we need to implement policies and laws that are the reflection of the commitment of the government, but if it is not implemented properly, if we cannot guide how, on the ground, in terms of implementation, it will be at the end only on paper. But realizing the policy and thrusting the policy into action, we need to work together with the local governments, local departments of the different ministries who are working on the ground to implement the policy so that we from the UN system, we can help.

If you look at the ILOs' work in this work promoting disability, they are working with employers and also the workers' association. So, if you look at UNP, they are also supporting persons with disability as a volunteer, providing volunteer services to others. So that way, the UN system has different mandates. But I must say, there is a coordination mechanism in the UN system UN Resident Coordinator of this is coordinating, coordinating the functions, coordinating in the UN city level, the coordination team level, how UN agencies are actually addressing the disability in their programming, in their policy support, and targeting. So, in such a situation, at the UN level, we can have a mapping of our own work and also reflect how better what actually are the challenges that we

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Mr. Haque, may I request that you finish in one minute? Thank you.

**MOZAMMEL HAQUE:** Definitely. We can measure how our work is supporting the inclusion agenda. However, we are really targeting the persons with disabilities. Whether our board in different programs and projects, and we are organizing, whether there is a participation of persons with disability or not. That way, we can really, you know, help in terms of bringing persons with disabilities, their experiences in our work and shaping our work,



programming measure, and you know, to make it more inclusive. In such a situation, the UN system, the UN DP can work. UNDP is you know, UNDP is an agency of, you know, as an indicator of the SDGs. We can also help others to come together for better inclusion. Thank you. Thank you very much.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you, Mr. Haque. I think many of the things that you talked about, some of the important ones that I take away. One would be global best practices sharing. Second would be helping the government design for inclusion, so design for persons with disabilities from the very get go. And then, also, perhaps, something like a disability audit for services that we're also deploying. So, I think those are areas that the UN system could certainly help.

**JOLY MACFIE:** Can I interrupt? Interpreters, can we extend you to 90 minutes from the hour and 15, and we'll pay you the extra time so we can keep going without being rushed? Is that okay with you?

**MOZAMMEL HAQUE:** I need to live in five minutes.

**JOLY MACFIE:** We are good. So we can go until 11:30 then. I mean, until, whatever, to half past the hour.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Okay, okay. So, I will I mean, we are supposed to do a little bit of a Q&A. I will, in the interests of time, maybe we'll take two questions, if they come up, if anybody wants to raise their hand. I'll see who's raising their hand and I will go to that person before we end with our Honorable DG, our special guest. Anybody wants to ask a question or offer a suggestion? I don't see any hands. Any of the panelists or the two keynote speakers, do they want to share any last thoughts? You can start speaking, if you want. Okay, I think all questions have probably been answered automatically by the great speakers and the panelists, so.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** Anir, just for your information, some of the people may face difficulties to join today's webinar because of the registration process. So, we are apologizing to them, that maybe they can post this webinar to our website, thank you.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Okay, I think that's great. Thank you. Thank you for that, Mr. Vashkar Bhattacharjee. Mr. Haque, please, go ahead. I will actually end with the last speaker, or special guest, Dr. Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal, DG of Department of Social Services. That would be wonderful if you could stay for a couple minutes, Mr. Haque. So, the organization that leads and facilitates really as a guardian of persons with disabilities. And now we are talking about special abilities in Bangladesh. Honorable DG, Mr. Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal, please.

**ABU SALEH MOSTAFA KAMAL:** Thank you very much. Honorable chief guests, though they are already been left. Distinguished keynote speakers and panelists, moderators, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening to you all, considering local time.

First, I would like to thank the organizer for organizing such a timely meeting, international webinar on digital inclusion for persons with disabilities to achieve the global goals.

As you know, persons with disabilities are addressed in the four goals. Namely, this is SDG 4, 8, 10, 11, and 17. And you will be happy to know that also the rights of the persons with disabilities are highly appreciated in the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities.

If we see that global context, about 15% of the world's total population has some form of disabilities. And in this information open technology, various steps have been taken internationally to ensure equal participation of all citizens, including persons with disabilities in digital services.

If we consider the national context, as you know, Bangladesh is among the first 20 countries in the world to sign and ratify the UN CRPD. And our government, by this time, enacted the rights and protection of persons with disabilities act 2030 to ensure the rights and overall development of the persons with disabilities, the issue of the inclusive digital services and accessibility of the persons with disabilities in digital services are insured.

There has been a drafted guideline named Web and Digital Services Designing Guideline For Ensuring Inclusive Accessibility 2022." Not only that, Bangladesh government has already taken some initiative in this. Mainly, the Department of Social Service has identified and registered more than 30 (?) persons with disabilities in their DIS system, as our chief guest already mentioned it. The government has taken various initiatives to (?) this population in digital activities.

Currently, there are more than 33,000 government websites and more than 1,000 digital citizen services in the various government office and fillable in Bangladesh. In addition, various private services, including job portal, eCommerce, new portal, online and mobile banking services, have gained immense popularity and use is steadily increasing. In order to make this government and private website, mobile apps, and digital services accessible to all types of disabled people, activities have started from the expert to the innovate (?) programme. Meanwhile, all developed by a2i have ensured up to 70% accessibility, but not in cases of 100%.

Including multimedia, talking books, and accessible dictionary, includes the university initiative, where there are some equipment and modern technologies including e library also. These are the initiatives we've taken, as you know. And finally, a 2 i has been working to make digital financial services accessible initially for banks has been chosen for the accessibility assessment, such as the Standard Bank and (?) bank. So, these are a few words from DSS. With these few words, I would like to conclude here. Thank you.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you, Honorable DG. You've always guided us and will continue to guide us in the future to ensure that persons with disabilities or special abilities have complete inclusion. And as we build, as Vashkar Bhattacharjee talked about, as we plan and build the Smart Bangladesh of 2041, it's quite some time away, but really, the building

process starts now. Already started building from Digital Bangladesh towards Smart Bangladesh.

I take away four important things from this wonderful discussion. I have to thank all the panelists, the three panelists, the two keynote speakers, our Chief Guest, our special guests and Chair, and also all the organizers who have put this programme together. But the four takeaways that I have. One in terms of philosophy. So, instead of persons with disabilities, I think we should really start saying persons with special abilities, and identify that the special abilities should drive our design.

The second important thing that I take away is the knowledge in technology sharing from across the world. I think brilliant work. We heard from Fiji. Brilliant work is going on. We heard from UN. Brilliant work is going on in different parts of the world. And those can be incorporated, instead of reinventing the wheel.

The third is, we need to mandate design for inclusion, from the very get go, instead of making inclusion an after thought. So, here, I think all the programme design I talked about perhaps the disability design, disability audits. So, these will actually help with the execution, not just ratifying and planning policies and guidelines, but implementing those guidelines. And the fourth and the last point I take away is, potentially, we could look at innovation fund and challenge competition, something that we do at a2i on a regular basis, and other organizations within ICT Division and within the Government of Bangladesh have started doing this recently. So, challenge competitions in innovation fund for inclusive design for digital services. I think those could also help move us closer to the goal of Smart Bangladesh for Everyone, not just Smart Bangladesh for the normally abled people, but smart Bangladesh for the specially enabled people as well. So, thanks again for today's program. I'm very privileged to moderate today's discussion. Thanks all the guests, panelists, speakers, and the audience for your kind presence and your patience for the extended time. Joly, over to you.

**JOLY MACFIE:** I would think Gunela could have the final word, if she's on.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Sure, absolutely.

**GUNELA ASTBRINK:** Well, thank you very much. I think it's been a very informative session. We have learned a lot. We have shared a lot. And I think that is always important. We can always learn from each other in whatever way it is. So, we've heard about implementation, the importance of that. And I just put in the chat, I think that it's, again, talking to people with disability, the disability community, about what we want as a disability community when it comes to terminology, when it comes to how we design accessible ICT. So, it's a big thank you to everyone, and especially people with disability, who we are all working for to make it more accessible. So, thank you very much for today.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Gunela, thank you.

**JOLY MACFIE:** Okay, that's a wrap.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thanks, Joly, for your facilitation and making sure that we're all heard all over the world. Thank you.

**VASHKAR BHATTACHARJEE:** Thank you very much, all, for joining today, and we are really grateful. Thank you, Mr. Chowdhury, for your time.

**ANIR CHOWDHURY:** Thank you. It's been a privilege. Bye, everyone.